

# The True Villain

**By: ElectraGoob**

Sometimes, the worst villains are the ones who look just like the rest of us. When an Akuma attack goes very wrong, Hawkmoth must change sides and fight against the clock as Marinette's time runs out. Trigger Warning: Kidnapping and Human Trafficking

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# My Name is Hawkmoth

**Hello! This story is definitely here because I have been binge watching Criminal Minds for FAR too long. This story has a very serious tone to it and goes into some very serious themes such as rape and human trafficking. Please bear with me through this, it was interesting to write and the themes are definitely not something we will ever see in the show. But it is a thing that is happening in Paris, London, New York, EVERYWHERE!**

---

He shoved his hands in his pockets as he walked down the busy roads of Grenelle. To the north he could see the Eiffel Tower looming above him. It stood as a constant reminder of a time he could never return to. Her smiling face as she wrapped her arms around him. His father laughing at the faces she made as he tried to take a good picture of the two of them in front of the tower. How he wished it could be that simple. But it did not matter anymore. He had just received a phone call from one of his coworkers that their latest shipment had been stolen. Yet another man who worked for him had been, for lack of a better word, fired for his incompetence in the whole matter. He had allowed the merchandise to be stolen, invited the thieves in, in fact. He kicked a discarded coffee cup toward a trash can as he fumed. The seething bitterness over the whole matter made his insides boil. Where was he going to get merchandise like that again?

They were too perfect. They were sold for a handsome price and were about to be shipped to their buyer. He had to return the money. Almost 50,000 Euros a piece for them, not to mention all the money put into this product. They were so genuine and perfect. Someone might even think they were real. And the fact that he had lost them made his insides turn in disgust.

"I can help you get your product back," a voice echoed in his mind.

"What?" he called out as he looked around him, trying to find the man engaging in a conversation that, honestly, was none of his business.

"All you have to do is help me get some products that are mine."

The man instinctively slid between some buildings and looked up and down the alley. "Who are you?"

"My name is Papillion, I will help you if you can help me in return. You see, there are a couple of jewelry pieces that were stolen from me, much like your products, whatever they were, were stolen from you. I'll give you the power to take them back; all I need is for you to get Chat Noir and Ladybug's jewelry."

"Chat Noir and Ladybug," the man said with an evil grin. "Well why didn't you say so?"

He felt his body being wrapped in darkness. When he looked at himself he was dressed in ridiculous outfit with a crazy mask. His insides lurched at the thought of being so flamboyant.

"Boss man," he said with a laugh, "You have quite the fashion sense, but all I need from you is a little info on where Chat Noir and Ladybug could be."

"Oh?" Papillion sounded impressed, "Very well. All I really know is that the two of them are connected to the school closest to the Eiffel Tower."

"Say no more, Boss Man," the man said holding up his hands and grinning, "That's all I need. So if you could, can I have my own clothes back?"

The darkness disappeared from him once more, but the voice inside his head remained, "When you get their Miraculous, leave them someplace for me to find, I will collect them later."

"You got it, Boss Man," the man said turning to leave the alley, a new goal in mind.

# Citizens of Paris

**Things are starting to get serious now... What does this man have in mind? Will he ever use the powers he has been offered?**

---

Marinette walked down the steps of her school and toward her home. She had said her farewells to Alya and planned to spend the rest of her day working on a design she had come up with earlier that day. She was incredibly excited and was staring at the sketches she had made as she walked around the corner of the school.

In an instant she felt a large hand cover her face with a rag. She stopped breathing and began to scratch at the hand while using all her energy trying to beat the body away. The body remained silent and overpowering. She screamed into the rag and inhaled for a second try. That was when everything slowed down. The smell from the rag was foreign, but she knew that she was in serious trouble if she lost consciousness. She continued to struggle weakly against the man as she saw a large vehicle pull up to the side of the road. Her eyes fluttered desperately as she felt herself being lifted into the car. There were muffled sounds all around her as her vision grew darker.

The man slammed the van door shut and looked around. Not a soul in sight. He heard the voices of the other students beginning to leave the school and come toward the corner. He slammed his hand against the side of the van and it drove away without him. He had gotten really lucky.

She felt the car shift into gear and begin to drive off. Her kwami was moving in her bag lodged between the curve of her hip and the hard surface of the vehicle. Then everything went dark.

"What are you doing?" the voice asked him rather frantically.

"Relax, Boss Man," he said coolly, "I'm doing what you asked."

"You just kidnapped that girl!" his voice was dark and angry. "That was *NOT* what I asked of you."

"I'm well aware, Boss Man," he chuckled as he scanned the boys leaving the school. "But you *did* say you would help me get my products back." His eyes fell on a boy with bright blond hair and green eyes. That was the one he wanted. But he got into a limousine with a large man holding the door for him. He was perfect, but he was guarded. He'd have to either find someone else, or catch him at just the right moment.

Papillion stood amongst his butterflies in shock. His grip on his staff tightened as his vision merged between the room around him and the sight of the man staring at Adrien for far too long. This had been a mistake.

"What's the problem, Boss Man?" the man spoke once again.

"Who are you?" Papillion whispered back.

"Uh-uh," the man chided, "That's for me to know and you to *NEVER* find out. And since you led me right to the product I need, I think our partnership can be hereby dissolved. Thank you very much, Boss Man."

There was a sudden pain in Papillion's head, causing him to stumble back. He held a hand to his forehead and collapsed to the floor, his knees making an ominous echoing sound in the empty room. His head was swimming and his heart was racing beyond control. What was he going to do? Nooroo floated in front of his shaking form.

"He's kidnapped a girl. He called her a product. He's going to sell her. He looked at my son, *MY SON* !"

"Gabriel," Nooroo said carefully.

"We have to get her back, but," he stood and looked out his window. How was he supposed to go to the police and tell them about this? They would have him as suspect number one. What would that do to his reputation? What would that do to his life, his son? No. He had to get help as quickly as possible without putting his own family in danger. But what could he do?

"Chat Noir! I can get him to go after..." his voice trailed. That boy was the same age as the girl that was taken. No doubt sending him into this will lead to more trouble.

And what if his suspicions were correct? Could he put his son in such danger?

There was no doubt that if Chat was brought into the matter he would insist on going after his friend on his own.

Gabriel's mind was running at a million miles per hour as he paced his office. Every second counted. That girl was going to die. If the statistics were correct, he only had twenty three hours and thirty two minutes left before she would be found dead.

"Mr. Agreste," his assistant said looking at her tablet, "you have a meeting in-"

"Forget the meetings," he said with a wave of his hand, his other hand had run through his hair so many times it had fallen over his forehead in sweaty strands.

"Are you alright?" Natalie said looking up from her tablet with a small hint of worry in her furrowed eyebrows.

"No-yes, leave me be," he said looking over his desk, trying to find an excuse.

"Father, are you okay?" the sudden voice from his son made his heart break into pieces. How could he ever face his son knowing one of his friend's lives was quickly fading away?



"Do you need to see a doctor?" he felt his son's presence too close to him. He looked up at Adrien's concerned face. Those green eyes pierced his own and his heart leapt to his throat. He simply stared at his son with a look of horror as his son's mouth opened as he inhaled.

"What happened?!" he said loudly. His voice shook Gabriel to the core. His mind stopped dead. So many questions that had, up to this point, made him insane, had suddenly disappeared.

He stood tall, almost looming over his son, "I must excuse myself for the rest of the day. I will be here in my office, but do not disturb me."

Adrien frowned, his eyebrows lowered in a similar manner his mother's had whenever one of his lies was not enough to satisfy her curiosity. But Gabriel stood firm, he would not waver in his decision. Adrien looked toward Natalie, and then back to him; he nodded and left the room without another word.

When the door shut behind him and Natalie he heard the distinct sound of the door being locked. He sighed and shoved his hands in his pockets before walking up the large flight of stairs up to his large and lonely room. Once the door shut he wandered over to his window. Gazing out over the rooftops of Paris he could not help but feel uneasy. Something had thrown his father off terribly and he was, once again, not letting anyone in to help him.

"Are you okay, Adrien?" Plagg asked as he sat on Adrien's shoulder.

"No," he said quickly, "yes, I suppose it's nothing," he corrected calmly.

The day was slipping away all too quickly.

Papillon stood in the shadows of a large crossbeam on the Eiffel Tower. If he had realized how high the tower truly was, he would never have allowed any Akuma to come near this tower. He was taking a huge risk, here, but he needed help and time was slipping

away. Taking a deep breath he stepped forward into the light. The sunlight burned his eyes as he scanned the crowds beneath him.

"Citizens of Paris!" he called out, catching many people's attention.

## You Just Can't

Adrien was just finishing his chemistry homework when he heard the notification on his phone. Alya had a scoop on the Ladyblog. He rushed over to his computer, maybe it was an Akuma attack.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a first! The infamous Papillion, or Hawkmoth, has just revealed himself on the Eiffel Tower above me. He has just called out Chat Noir to come and see him!" Alya nearly screamed into her phone before turning the camera back to the tower.

"Come and meet me alone here as soon as you can, Chat Noir! I will be waiting." And just as quickly as he appeared, he vanished.

"Plagg, claws out," Adrien said without moving from his position in front of his monitor.

In a flash of green, he was out the window and bounding over rooftops toward the tower. He pulled out his baton and tried to call Ladybug, but she was not anywhere to be found. His heart dropped as he neared the place where Hawkmoth called him out.

"Hawkmoth," Chat hissed as he pulled out his baton and prepared for battle.

"There is no time for any of that, Chat Noir," Hawkmoth said dismissively. "Right now, you and I need to talk like two civilized people."

"Like *that's* ever going to happen," Chat growled as he began to lunge at the man.

"STOP AND LISTEN TO ME YOU IMPUDENT CHILD!" Hawkmoth shouted as he dodged the staff and grabbed it, pulling Chat closer.

"NO!" Chat shouted back as he pushed Hawkmoth with all his strength toward the edge of the tower.

"IF YOU DO NOT LISTEN TO ME, SHE WILL BE KILLED!" he shouted stupidly.

"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH LADYBUG?!" Chat's eyes held a fierceness only an angry lion could possess, but also glistened with the tears only a child could have.

"IT WAS NOT MY FAULT!" Hawkmoth defended before letting Chat's baton go and taking a few steps back. "It's not," he ran a hand over his mask down to the back of his neck, "but I have to make it right! Someone has kidnapped a girl and is going to kill her! Or sell her! Or," he began to shake angrily at the very thought of what could be happening to the girl.

"Y-you," Chat struggled to understand, running his clawed glove through his hair and scratching his neck, "What?"

"That Marinette girl," Hawkmoth fumbled for a moment before regaining his sense of urgency, "She's been kidnapped by someone trying to sell her. And I need your help to get her back to safety."

Chat Noir stood still, trying to take in what he had just been told.

"I know I have done awful things, but I would never," his voice died off, "What this man is doing is inhumane and I cannot allow this man to go through with his awful plan."

"You can't sell a human," Chat tried to reason, "You just can't."

"That does not stop the truly evil from trying," Hawkmoth said softly, "There are people out there, Chat, who have no respect for humans. They see them, especially children, as nothing more than objects. I cannot justify anything that I have done," he looked at his filthy hands and clenched them tightly, "but I will not let this girl die

because of the mistake I made. So I am humbly asking you to help me make this right, Chat Noir."

"I will help you," Chat said quietly, just above a whisper, "But I am doing this for Marinette."

"I expect nothing less." Hawkmoth said looking out over the afternoon sky; she had been gone for almost two hours. "Go to the police and tell them that-"

"You go to the police," Chat said angrily, "you know exactly what happened to her. You know details that I could not tell them. If you want to make this right, take responsibility."

Hawkmoth faltered for a moment, he then looked at the black cat as he scanned the city.

"Very well," he said softly, "I'll do this for the girl. She is the one who matters the most at this time." he walked toward the stairs and looked toward Chat. "You wouldn't happen to be willing to help ensure I am not arrested in my attempt to save your friend, would you?"

Chat stood straight and looked toward the man behind him. Could this be shameful cowardice, or a true request or help in saving his friend?

"Fine," he said following the purple-clad villain.

When they arrived at the police station, Marinette had been missing for nearly two hours. Hawkmoth was met with some doubtful officers at first, but they took Chat's word for it when he said he was only interested in finding Marinette. When the police force was preparing to find her, Marinette had been missing for two and a half hours. Tom and Sabine Dupain-Cheng were utterly distraught. The thought that their daughter was in the hands of a human trafficker was almost too much to bear.

The sight of the grieving parents made Gabriel suffer in ways he never thought he would be able to since his wife disappeared.

The sound of Chat Noir clearing his throat broke him from his silent reverie.

"Do you have any idea where to start looking for her?" Chat was leaning against the wall; his eyes looked angry and hurt.

"Yes," Hawkmoth said as he picked up his cane and walked toward the main doors, "the school."

Chat followed closely behind. When they reached the side of the road he extended his baton and looked at the older man, "Shall we?"

Hawkmoth gripped his cane tighter and bounced from one foot to the other, "I suppose we shall."

Chat took off over the rooftops and toward his school. He expected the old man to lag behind, but was surprised to see the man gaining on him. Hawkmoth reached the corner where Marinette was taken first.

"Was this where it happened?" Chat said, wasting no time in looking around the area for any clues.

"Further down the sidewalk," Hawkmoth said as he pointed near a mailbox.

Chat walked toward the mailbox and scanned the ground for any sort of clue. The air smelled different the farther down he went.

"It smells sweet here," Chat said as he walked back and forth, "and the smell lingers longest right about," he walked down by a tree about three meters from the mailbox, "here."

"That is the smell of the chloroform used to knock her out. Don't try to inhale too much of it. It works almost instantly," Hawkmoth explained. "He was standing behind that tree waiting for her to come

around the corner. Once he knew that she was the one he wanted, he came to meet her."

"She was walking toward him, how did she not see him coming and run?" Chat wondered looking around the area. His eyes caught something pink in the grass by the building. He stooped down to get a closer look. Marinette's sketch book lay open and dirty on the ground.

"From what I recall, she was looking down at that book," Hawkmoth said quietly. "She fought back, scratched and kicked. It wasn't until she tried calling for help that she began to lose consciousness."

Chat stood up once again and looked around the street. There had to be someone who had seen something. He crossed the street and looked into some of the store windows. There was a small café that the students of the school visited during lunch. Perhaps someone inside saw something?

# Trust Your Other Half

**What will Hawkmoth do now that this man is threatening the lives of innocent children? What will happen to Marinette and Tikki?!**

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Her head was pounding. There was something soft under her body, but it felt dirty. She tried to move her hands to help her sit up, but they would not move. Her feet were in the same state. They were bound by zip-ties. Marinette opened her eyes and scanned her surroundings. She was in a large dog cage that was locked with a large padlock. She was on a bed of very old blankets. There was only one light in the room she was in, it looked as if it were either an old workshop, basement, or garage. It was cold; there was a draft from a small window high on the wall opposite from her. She strained to see outside it, but the glass was clouded over from lack of care. She thought she could see grass at the base of the window, meaning she was in a basement. The walls of the room were covered in dust and old tools. There was a door to the left of the window. In front of that was a camera. A flashing red dot indicated that it was recording. Her heart sank as she took the room in. She was trapped and scared. Marinette leaned her head to the side and breathed a sigh of relief when she felt the prick of her miraculous on the side of her head. She looked down at her purse that she had around her neck and choked back a small cry. It was gone.

Tikki was gone.

She was truly alone.

And she was terrified.

The door opened, snapping Marinette from her thoughts. A well-built man entered the room. He held a tray in his hands. He placed the



tray on the ground beside the cage, only then did the man's face become clear to her.

He took something out of his pocket and walked to the back of the cage. He grabbed Marinette's hands and pulled her back. She let out a cry of pain as he connected a zip-tie to her restraints, making it impossible for her to move forward. The cage was unlocked and the man placed the tray in front of her. After the lock was replaced, he cut the ties from her wrists.

"Eat," he said simply as he walked toward the camera to check something. He adjusted it a little and then stared at her. In the darkness, he was nothing but a large shadow.

Marinette looked from the man to the tray of food in front of her. It was cooked chicken and mixed vegetables. Her stomach let out a small cry for attention as she tried to decide if the food was poisoned or not.

"It's not poisoned," the man said as if answering her unspoken question, "I need you very much alive."

Marinette let out a small sigh of relief, but that did not stop the tears from falling down her cheeks.

"What do you want with me?" she said through desperate sobs.

The man remained silent.

"Why are you doing this to me?!" she shouted as she got to her knees and held onto the wires of the cage she was in.

The man turned and left the room, a sobbing Marinette in his wake.

Tikki was weak. Being so far away from the Miraculous was not safe for her. But the moment she was thrown from the vehicle in Marinette's purse she knew she had to get help. Master Fu would know what to do. He found her once; surely he could find her again.

She flew through the old man's window and landed on a pillow. She regained her bearings and spotted Master Fu sitting among burning incense and candles. His face was sullen, but determined. Wayzz was buzzing about frantically.

"Master Fu," she gasped.

Master Fu turned suddenly at the voice of his guest. He rushed over and took the tired kwami in his hands. Wayzz sat beside her and checked her for injuries.

"What has happened?" Fu asked as he laid her down on a cushion. He began to chant an old Chinese spell as Tikki gasped helplessly.

"Marinette. Taken. Two men. Van. Hawkmoth." She wheezed.

"He has gone too far, Master," Wayzz growled as he continued to fuss over Tikki.

"No," Fu said softly when his chant was done, "Hawkmoth did not know this would happen to her. Even now he is struggling with what to do about this whole matter. But we must act quickly if we are to save Marinette in time."

Tikki sat up weakly on the cushion, "What are we going to do?"

"You are going to rest," Wayzz scolded.

"You both are going to calm down," Fu said quietly. "Hawkmoth is aware of the error of his ways and he will try to make it right. Until then, we must assume Marinette is an average girl, for her identity's sake."

"Her identity," Tikki scoffed, "her life could be in danger and all you can think of is her identity?!"

"Rest, Tikki," Fu responded coolly.

"If you are wanting me to regain my strength," Tikki shot back, "take me to Marinette! I will be able to sense my Miraculous *and* my chosen!"

"Chat Noir is all she needs right now," Fu raised his hand in dismissal. "You must trust your other half to save her."

Tikki's eyes stung. She knew Plagg had never let her down. She also knew that Marinette was resilient and could hold her own in a dangerous situation. But this danger seemed all too much for her.

## **Because They Look Like ME?**

Chat and Hawkmoth entered the café and walked toward the counter.

"We have some questions about something that happened across the street earlier this afternoon," Chat said calmly as he looked at the surprised clerk.

"What do you need to know?" the girl responded as she glanced from the hero to the purple man.

"There was a man standing by that tree across the street," Chat pointed, "just after school let out. Did you see him?"

The woman followed his finger toward the tree, "I recall seeing a man there. He had a hoodie and cap on. I thought it was odd considering how hot it is today."

"Does that camera work?" Hawkmoth cut in suddenly.

The woman looked up toward a camera which was pointed toward the counter. "Yes."

"Can we please view the recording?" he said staring at the girl.

"I don't think I can give you that kind of permission. My manager is in the back, though," she said taking a few steps from the counter.

"We don't have that much time," Hawkmoth said suddenly, causing the girl to jump.

"I'm sorry, but I-"

"Let us see the tapes," he fumed.

"This way," she said weakly, she was choking back tears. She opened the door marked "Employees Only" and ushered them through. "The manager's office is the second door on the right."

"Thank you very much," Chat offered as Hawkmoth stormed down the hallway. "There's a missing girl and we cannot waste any time in getting her back."

By the time Chat caught up to Hawkmoth, he was already bullying the manager to let him view the tapes.

"We don't have *time* to sign paperwork or ledgers. We need to view your tapes NOW."

"Hawkmoth!" Chat shouted back, "We may be in a hurry to do good, but that does not excuse us from doing the wrong thing. I will sign the papers, sir."

The manager nodded stiffly as he produced the papers for Chat to sign. In the meantime, Hawkmoth was mumbling as he looked for the time stamp he needed.

The screen flashed to almost three hours in the past. A man in a heavy hoodie and cap stood beside a tree. In the café, the clerk was talking with a customer. A large van pulled up in front of the shop and the tree and mailbox were hidden from view. By the time the van moved, the man, and Marinette, was gone.

"Pull it back," Chat said over Hawkmoth's shoulder.

The screen flashed back to when the van pulled up to the store.

"It's unmarked," Hawk said flatly. He was frustrated.

"Not quite," Chat said leaving the room. He walked out of the café and stood where the front of the van had stopped. He breathed deep and then walked across the street. There was a smell of oil and rust in the air. "Both vans that were here came from the same place," he

said as he scanned the streets. "Now if only there was a way to know which way they could have possibly gone."

"What did you smell, boy?" Hawk asked as he reached Chat on the side of the road.

"Oil and rust," he said thinking hard, "The vans were both old. But I have nothing to go off of after that."

"A dead end," Hawk said dejectedly as he ran his hand from the top of his head to the base of his neck.

"Don't say that," Chat said bitterly as he walked up and down the sidewalk.

"Okay, let's think back to the kidnapper," Hawk said walking toward the tree. "I am standing out in the open because I am confident. I fit in and no one will look at me twice. I have been given the opportunity to get my goods back and the mention of Chat Noir and Ladybug entice me to do it without aid. I must be confident in my work."

"What are you doing?" Chat asked, stopping beside the man.

"I am putting myself in his shoes," Hawk said looking around. "I am waiting for a potential kid to come out of school, which lets out at 2:35 every weekday. But I do not expect someone to come around the corner until at least 2:40 because most students will stop and talk to one another. But the girl comes around the corner at 2:37, three minutes early. Why?"

"Her designs," Chat answered holding up her sketch book. *She mentioned wanting to get to work on this design as soon as possible, she left in a hurry.* "She must have had something she wanted to work on."

"A design," Hawk said looking at the sketches, "she was looking down when he came up to her. He grabs her and holds the rag over her face. She does not go down without a fight. She is scratching

and hitting as much as she can. She is aware of the danger and is not going out calmly. The van comes up quickly and she is thrown in. She has already inhaled enough chloroform that she is passing out. Partner number two is given the all clear to leave, and he moves on to his next target." Hawk moved from the corner to the front of the school. Police were scanning the area, making their way toward the corner. "I spot my next potential victim," Hawk stopped suddenly and glanced at Chat. He didn't want to think about his son being taken in the same way. Chat looked back at him curiously. "That is when I stepped in and tried to stop the kidnapping."

"A little late," Chat said bitterly. He was mad at both himself and Hawk. If only he had talked with her or walked her home, maybe she would be safe. "Who was his next target? We should be sending someone to check up on them!"

Gabriel did not hear Chat, his mind was on a mad dash to catch something he might have missed.

"Ladybug," he whispered.

"Ladybug?" Chat repeated, "what about her?"

"She looks like Ladybug," Hawk replied turning on his heel and going toward the police station.

"What?" Chat called after him, trying to match his pace.

"He's going after Chat Noir and Ladybug look-alikes in order to sell them." Hawk was practically sprinting over rooftops toward the station.

"You mean..."

"The other child he spotted looked a lot like you, boy," Hawk said passively. His insides lurched when he no longer heard the heavy footsteps behind him.

"Me?" Chat was stopped beside a chimney, his eyes blurry and unfocused.

Hawk was on the next roof ahead of him, but returned to his side.

"You mean there are people out there being sold as slaves simply because they look like me?" Chat's voice was quiet, barely above a whisper. The idea that someone could be sold into such a horrid life because they looked like him was sickening. His face was everywhere around Paris, not only as Chat Noir, but also as Adrien. If people wanted someone like him and Ladybug around as mindless playthings and those people were being kidnapped from their homes, schools, and lives... his mind was becoming a mess of thoughts and emotions.

"You are having too many emotions right now," Hawk scolded as he urged Chat on with a firm hand on his shoulder. "Focus on the task at hand and then try to sort this mess out."

Chat closed his eyes and took a deep breath. As much as he hated it, Hawkmoth was right. Marinette needed him. He could cry over this matter after she was safe at home. He fixed his eyes on the roof of the police station and pressed on. Hawkmoth frowned at his retreating figure and began his pursuit.



## Comply, Behave, Wait

The red light of the camera was still flashing. Marinette had been laying as still as she could in the poorly lit room since the man left. If someone was watching her, she would not give him anything to watch. From the orange hue of the light coming from the window, she figured the sun was setting. She had been here for about four hours, it was almost dinner time.

*I wonder if my parents have noticed that I am gone. She wondered. They don't know where I am during the day a lot because I'm Ladybug. But perhaps it would have been good if we checked in with one another more regularly. That way, they would know I was missing for sure.* Marinette's eyes began to sting, but she refused to cry. These men would not get any satisfaction from her pain. These men would be the object of her rage. *Perhaps Papillion will find me due to my anger. Then I could break out of here and-* The thought sounded good at first, but who would stop her after that? Ladybug was the only one who could purify the akumas.

The door burst open and the dark silhouette of the man who tried to feed her stood just behind the camera.

"Congratulations, kid," the man said happily, "you just sold for 53,000 Euros!"

*Sold?!*

"Now all I need is that little blonde boy and I'll have the matching set." In the darkness Marinette could tell he was grinning. It made her sick.

*Set? Could he be talking about Ladybug and Chat Noir?!*

"It was hard finding a little Asian girl with short hair and blue eyes," the man was laughing, "Ladybugs truly are lucky, you know. The first

one I see is the infamous Ladybug. And I spotted Chat Noir too. He'll be my next pick up tomorrow."

"I'm not Ladybug," Marinette said weakly. Her voice was tired and shaky, but the man could see the blue in her eyes. They held a storm that threatened to tear him to pieces.

"I don't care," he whispered back, "Rest up," he turned to leave the room, "you'll be leaving for your next checkpoint in a little while."

Marinette tried to break the zip ties around her wrists for a moment, the idea of being sold causing her to panic. But after a few moments she stopped.

*I need to focus on surviving. Comply, behave, and wait. There is no way for me to escape right now. I have a better chance when they try to move me.*

She lied back down on the musty blankets and stared at the flashing red light. On for three seconds, off for two and a half, on for three, off for two and a half. Before long, she had calmed herself enough to close her eyes and rest. Her wrists and ankles were rubbed raw from trying to break the ties. If only the ones on her wrists were in front of her, she could have broken them easily.

*And then what? She asked herself, You don't have Tikki, you don't know where Chat is, you are all by yourself right now.*

Comply.

Behave.

Wait.

Hawk Moth and Chat Noir stood behind the Tech. Analyst and watched as he scrolled down what felt like hundreds of pages. Each post was a different picture of some poor child being played off as a celebrity look-alike.

Chat felt sick to his stomach. He had seen far too many Adrien's and even a few of his fellow child models on this site. "Excuse me," he said when a particularly young boy was being sold as an Adrien look-alike came into view. He left the room quickly and stood by the door, taking deep breaths.

Hawk Moth came out after him. He looked at the cat boy for a moment. He did not look like Paris' Feline Knight. He didn't even look like a fifteen year old boy with too much energy. He looked like a small and frightened child who had just gotten a disgusting taste of reality. He had seen a look similar to that one day in his office.

His son had walked in unannounced and simply stared at him. His eyes were red from both shed and unshed tears. He said nothing at all; he just stared at him. He stared back, not knowing what to say or even do. After what seemed like an eternity, he got up from his desk and walked to his son. Without a word, he wrapped his arms around the boy's shoulders.

There were no words of comfort then.

There could be no words of comfort now.

"The world is broken," Hawk Moth said looking back at the man scrolling through helpless children.

"I just wish Ladybug's magic could make all that disappear," Chat said as he looked away from the man.

Hawk Moth sighed and rubbed the back of his neck, "It's never that simple."

Chat snuffed and wiped his face.

"There is no perfect plan or magic spell that can put an end to this," he offered uselessly.

"So do you expect us to simply ignore it?!" Chat shouted. He bit his lip and leaned back against the wall.

"There are people fighting this evil," Hawk said looking from Chat to the man at the computer, "They are the heroes no one knows about. They work tirelessly every day trying to keep the children of this world safe."

"I'm supposed to be a super hero," Chat's voice broke, "I'm supposed to be helping people who cannot help themselves."

"You are also a child," Hawk scolded. "It is not your job to right every wrong in this world. It is your job to be the light people can look to in the darkness that is consuming it."

"And how do I do that?" Chat asked his voice was still quivering.

"By staying safe," Hawk said sadly, "by making sure your friends are all safe. By staying happy and carefree. But also by not being ignorant of the world around you."

Chat's frown deepened, "After today, I don't know if I can."

"Think of your friend," Hawk said suddenly, "she is going through hell right now. When she gets out of this, she will be in need of the happiness and comfort that only Chat Noir and Ladybug can supply. She needs to know that she can be safe in this world. She needs to know that there are people out there that care about her. She needs *you* ."

Chat looked up at Hawk Moth with wide eyes.

"We've found her," a voice cut in from inside the room. Chat rushed in and stared at the computer screen.

From what he could tell it was nothing more than a pile of blankets in a dog cage, but to the side of the video were a few pictures of a

knocked out Marinette. The monsters must have taken those pictures while she was still knocked out from being kidnapped.

"If I hadn't seen you put her in that cage, I would never have thought there was someone in there," the man at the computer was reading the comments below the live feed.

"Where is she?" Chat asked as the man began to type frantically at his keyboard.

"We don't know. I'm tracing the live feed back to its origin, but it is going to be difficult. They are probably bouncing the signal off of various routers and towers. I am also shutting this site down."

"Is she in a basement?" another officer asked, looking at an enlarged video of Marinette.

"It looks like it," the analyst said as he continued typing. "There's a furnace and a water heater in the back corner."

"Something's happening," the room's lighting changed. "This has to be a basement, that lighting is not from sunlight. They're in a house."

Two men entered the room, both wearing hoodies and caps. One man went to the cage and grabbed at Marinette. He pulled her back against the cage. It looked as if Marinette cried out in pain. The other man unlocked the cage and opened the door.

Marinette was saying something to the men, but they did not listen. They placed a rag over her face and she fell limp. The man in the cage dragged her out and lifted her over his shoulder. The man who held her down walked to the camera.

"Got the IP address," the analyst said as the screen went black.

"They're moving her," the officer said getting up from his desk.

"Where are they now," Hawk said grabbing the printed address from the officer's hand. "Rue de Lyon," he read out loud, "That's all the

way over by the Bastille."

"Let's go," Chat said running out the door, Hawk at his heels.

## A Beacon of Hope

Marinette remained still and silent as she listened to the sounds above her. Sleep was out of the question, but she had managed to conserve her energy by letting her mind be at ease in the silence. But the voices above her caused her mind to go on high alert.

"He has a boat on the Seine," one voice said, "We are to meet him there at 8:45 tonight."

"That does not give us that much time," a second voice responded, "did he want her dressed?"

Marinette tensed.

"He didn't say either way. It's too much trouble. I say we leave her be."

"How long should it take to get there?"

"According to the traffic cameras, it should only take us about ten minutes."

*We must be close to the river .*

"So we have a half an hour to get everything ready," the second man walked somewhere else in the house.

"Fill the van up with gas," the first man walked somewhere and opened a door. "We will need to grab the merchandise in about twenty-five minutes."

Marinette's heart was beating fast. She looked at the flashing red light in an attempt to calm herself.

On for three seconds, off for two and a half.

The door opened to reveal the two men. Marinette remained still. Comply, behave, wait.

"The time has come, little lady," the first man said as he stood next to the cage. He had a set of keys in his hands. She sat up when the other man came around to the side of the cage where she was lying. The man grabbed her wrists and pulled her back. He did not stop pulling her until she felt her left arm make a painful popping sound.

She let out a cry and tried to hold her arm still. She could not tell if her arm was broke or if it was simply out of its socket, but the pain was enough to make her see stars.

The other man unlocked the cage and stooped to enter.

"Whatever you want, I'll do it," Marinette forced out through gritted teeth, "I won't run; I won't fight."

"Well, now," the man said with a dark smile that made her want to kick his face in, "That's a novel idea. But there is no way I'm going to let you do anything on your own." Marinette recognized the sweet smell and took a deep breath. The fumes were overwhelming, but she allowed the man to place the rag over her face. She dropped her head back and let her body go limp. She would have to fight through the pain of her left arm, but she refused to be unconscious for this.

She was dragged from the cage and thrown over the man's shoulder. She heard the sound on an old van's engine becoming more distinct. A door was opened and she entered a cool room. The sounds of feet echoed in the room. She must have been in a cement garage. The sliding door on the van opened and she felt her body being lowered onto the hard surface. Another body climbed in beside her and she heard the sound of the garage door opening. The engine was put into gear and it slowly pulled through the door.

Chat and Hawk flew over the rooftops at an alarming speed. When they reached Rue de Lyon they stopped to scan the streets and houses.



"White van," Chat said pointing, "they may be inside."

"Follow it," Hawk said taking off across the street and following the path of the van. Chat wasted no time in his pursuit.

Hawk Moth trailed slightly behind the van and scanned the street ahead. There was a police car not far in the distance, no doubt on its way to the house. He looked at his cane for a moment, a single butterfly resting on the glass orb.

"Fly quickly, my little akuma," he said releasing the butterfly, "we need the aid of the police in this."

The butterfly entered the cruiser as it turned away from the white van. It entered the badge of the officer at the wheel and he stopped the car.

"What are you doing, Michael?" the other officer said as he looked behind and ahead of them, "We have to get to the house!"

"Hello, Michael. I am Papillion. The men you are in pursuit of are in a white van headed toward the Seine. Allow me to give you a little help."

"Yes, sir," Michael said as a purple light covered his body. He jumped from the car in protective armor and sniper rifle. He offered a hand to his fellow officer, who also gained the powers. They both leapt to the rooftops and chased after the van. Michael was the first to land in front of the van. He took quick aim and shot out the front tires. The second officer ordered the people nearby to clear out. Chat Noir and Hawk Moth arrived just as the van skidded to a halt at the intersection by Boulevard de la Bastille. The driver got out of the van and stared at the officer.

"What are you doing?!" he looked at the damage on the van.

Marinette heard the sound of the tire being blown out and felt the van lurch and slide. She braced herself as best as she could as the van

came to a hard stop. She remained still as the man next to her threw a blanket over her and began to place large and heavy objects on her.

"We need to check your van, sir," the officer said as he neared the van.

"I need to see a warrant," the man responded as he shut the door.

Chat Noir walked up to the van and pulled the back hatch up, breaking the latch completely. "Why hello, sir. I'm here to check your goods."

Marinette let out a sigh of relief at the sound of Chat's voice. But her heart dropped when she heard the pop next to her. The man had fired a gun at Chat.

Chat felt the sting of the bullet grazing his shoulder. She was in there, no doubt about it.

"Who brings a gun to a routine inspection?" Chat said pulling out his baton.

"Chat Noir," Hawk Moth said running up beside him. The sight of the blood running down Chat's arm was enough to make Hawk Moth livid. He held his cane like a blade and lunged forward. The gun went off again, this time missing completely.

Marinette pushed the objects on her as hard as she could. She did not take any time looking around. She saw the man with the gun and pushed him with her body as hard as she could. The two fell from the van in a heap. The zip ties on her ankles snapped off and she struggled to find her balance. The man grabbed her by her left arm, causing her to cry out in pain, and lifted her up in front of him. The gun was held to her head.

"NO!" Chat and Hawk both cried.

Marinette froze. That was Hawk Moth. Was he behind this?

"Chat look out!" she cried, thinking he was going to be attacked by Hawk Moth.

Chat turned around but only saw Hawk Moth, who was also looking for someone behind them.

Marinette watched as they put two and two together.

"No time for explanations," Hawk Moth said as he summoned Michael.

The other man had been arrested and was currently stuck to the side of the van under heavy watch from the second officer.

Michael raced to a safe hiding spot and took aim.

"Try anything and I'll kill her," he said keeping the gun to Marinette's head.

Marinette was drained. The adrenaline and confusion was too much. The tears would not stop as her legs gave out from beneath her. The man suddenly had to put all his focus on keeping her standing. His left arm tightened around her collar bone, but she was slipping from his grip.

In a moment of pure luck, he used his right hand to drag her up. Chat took his chance and grabbed the gun in his hands. The gun went off and the two fell to the ground struggling over it. Marinette fell to the ground a little ways away, but the struggling pair managed to take their fight over to where she was. The man landed on her and in a last effort, she snapped the zip tie around her wrists and grabbed the man's hair. She pulled his head back as far as she could and stared into his eyes.

His eyes met hers.

The tears did not hide the pure fury and determination. They scared him.

Chat gained the upper hand alongside Hawk Moth and he was dragged off of her and thrown to the ground. Michael came up and arrested the man. In the struggle, five other cruisers had arrived on the scene.

Marinette let out a sob as she rolled to her side and cradled her arm. She hurt all over. She was terrified. She flinched when a pair of arms wrapped around her and lifted her from the ground.

"It's okay now," a tired voice whispered. "They can't hurt you anymore."

She pressed her face into the crook of the voice's neck, her chin hitting the cool bell that bounced slightly on his collar bone.

Chat carried her to a nearby ambulance where they were both treated for their wounds.

Hawk Moth watched the pair from a distance. If Chat truly was his son, he was proud. The way Chat valued life and wished for goodness was similar to his wife. He frowned as his gaze drifted to the other people around the scene. Whispers and pointing fingers were sent his direction. The akumatized officers were back to normal and were being praised for their hard work.

This was how it should be.

All of the Miraculous holders were supposed to be fighting against the forces of evil.

Instead they were fighting each other.

Turning on his heel, Hawk Moth made his way home. The darkening sky was illuminated by the city lights. The Eiffel Tower stood as a beacon of hope to the city.

## Laughter and Love: An Epilogue

Marinette was absent the next day of school. She sat on her bed with the empty box her Miraculous were found in. Tears were streaming down her face as she tried to desperately hope for the best. Tikki was nowhere to be found still.

The sound of rapping above her broke her from her lonely thoughts. She looked above where she sat on her bed. A pair of shining green eyes looked down at her.

"Chat?" she questioned as she lifted the latch. He lowered himself carefully into her room. "What are you doing here?"

Chat was staring at her intently as he held his hands together. They looked as if they were cradling something precious.

"I, uh," he cleared his throat and used a free hand to rub the back of his neck. "I came to return something."

Marinette blinked a couple times before noticing her purse over his shoulder. "My purse!"

"What?" Chat blinked before following her gaze to his hip where the pink bag hung. "Right, uh, we found this and your sketch book." He awkwardly handed the bag over and watched as she desperately dug through it. He smiled a little in understanding when she visibly broke from not finding something inside it.

"You know," he said sitting next to her on the bed, "I saw you talking to your bag a few times before and figured you were talking to yourself. I even saw you put a couple cookies in there at lunch sometimes."

Marinette only stared at him sadly.

"I sometimes do the same thing with my jacket. That's where I keep Plagg," he said with a smile.

"Plagg?" Marinette looked from his face to his hands.

"She's missed you," Chat said as he opened his hands to reveal a small red plush.

"Tikki!" Marinette cried as she took the little kwami from his hands. Tikki opened her eyes slightly and then leapt up for joy. She hugged the side of Marinette's face and cried out.

"Marinette! Oh Marinette you're okay!" The two cried together as Chat watched.

After the two's reunion Marinette stared at Chat in shock. "Y-you know..."

"I'm sorry, Marinette," Chat offered, his cat ears lowering in shame, "Master Fu said it was time for us to stop hiding something so important from one another."

"Chat," Marinette's eyes filled with tears again.

"Please, Marinette," Chat said kneeling beside her bed and taking her right hand in his, "You *have* to now who I am!"

Marinette blinked a few tears away and nodded. She watched as greenish lightning spread over Chat's body. She blinked a few times again when Adrien looked back at her, an apprehensive look on his face.

"Adrien," Marinette whispered before dropping to her knees as well and wrapping her good arm around his neck. She felt his arms gently wrap around her.

Adrien was terrified that she would hate him. He had gone against what she wanted without her knowledge.

Master Fu was waiting for him in his room when he got home the night before. He was shocked to see the old man sitting so peacefully in his home.

When he asked why he was there he simply motioned to the couch he was sitting on. There, on one of the pillows, was the little red kwami.

"The time has come for the Miraculous holders to work together," Fu said looking from Tikki to Adrien. "Go to Miss Dupain-Cheng's home tomorrow and return her kwami."

"Miss Dupain-Cheng?" Adrien asked, his eyes widening, "You mean Marinette is-"

"You act so surprised," Fu interrupted before getting up to leave.

Adrien spent that night in a restless sleep, wondering if Marinette would be able to handle such a revelation after such a traumatic ordeal. He decided it would be best if he simply told her the truth and was there for her as support. He did not care if she never accepted his feelings.

Love was not a feeling.

It was an action.

He would love her no matter what; he would not give up on her simply because she did not show him the same amount of care.

The hug he shared with Marinette in her room was enough for him. He could face anything for her from that point on.

"You idiot," her broken voice snapped him out of his romance and he stared at her in shock and fear.

"What?" he asked, a huge blush spreading over his face.

"You were shot!" she said, pointing to his bandaged arm. "You should not be running over rooftops with that injury! I will not allow it! You need to go home and rest! No more Chat Noir for you until you are healed. And when was the last time you had a proper meal? You're a model, I understand, but you are much more active than you let on. You need to have more carbs in your diet. I will ask my Papa to make you some rolls to add to your lunches."

"Mari," Adrien laughed as she began to pace around the room.

"How many meals do you end up missing anyway? Are you even taking care of yourself? You have so much to do as it is without adding your work as Chat Noir, how are you getting the rest of your work done?"

Adrien continued to watch as Marinette paced and ranted about how Adrien was a hungry and busy person with a huge smile on his face. She may have been scolding him, but all he heard her say was, "I love you; I care for you; I want you to be safe." And that was all he needed. He got up from where he was sitting on the loft and stepped in front of her path. He wrapped his arms around her shoulders and rested his chin on her head.

"I understand," he said softly, "I feel the same way with you."

He felt her relax in his embrace. Her un-casted arm grabbed at the back of his shirt and he felt her breathe a sigh of relief.

Words were not enough for this moment.

But that didn't stop Marinette from breaking the silence once more.

"You're having dinner with us," she said flatly.

"Am I now?" he challenged.

"I still believe you are too skinny," she patted his back and took a step back. "I can pick you up with too much ease."



Adrien laughed out loud. He loved how she could make him laugh. "Fine," he said walking toward the loft once more. "What time? I'll be here."

Marinette put her hand on her hip and smiled, "7 o'clock. Don't be late."

Chat Noir flung himself through the window and leaned his head in to look at her once more, "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

She smiled and walked over to where Tikki was sitting, a huge grin on her face.

"So glad to see you two finally together," Tikki giggled before going for another hug.

"And I'm glad that you're okay," Marinette sighed.

When six thirty came, Marinette was sitting by the kitchen island rolling dough out awkwardly with one hand. She glanced at the clock with a frown when she heard a knock at the door.

"I'll get it," she said as she wiped her hands off on the apron she was wearing. She opened the door to reveal a blushing and oddly stiff Adrien. "You're early."

"You told me not to be late and I figured this would not be a very good date if I came just to eat and-" he stopped and stared, his blush spreading into his hairline and down his neck. What if Marinette did not think of this as a date? What if he made her uncomfortable about this whole thing? "I mean, it's not a date if you don't-"

"No, no," Marinette blurted suddenly while waving her hands, "It's okay if this is a date. It will be a double date with my parents," Marinette then took her turn blushing madly, "U-unless that sounds lame to you?"

"It sounds great!" Adrien said suddenly, his eyes catching Sabine leaning over the counter and watching the two.

"Great," Marinette said following his gaze and jumping, "Maman, I'll put the dough on the tray now." She rushed into the kitchen and began to awkwardly fumble with the food.

Adrien followed her warily, suddenly becoming all too aware of the eyes on him. Tom had greeted him in the bakery; he was closing up for the night. But Sabine had kept her in her sight from the moment the door was opened.

"I-I'll help with that," Adrien said as he fumbled with the rolls just as much as Marinette did.

"How about I do that and you two go and enjoy one another's company?" Sabine offered, taking the tray from the two teens and walking toward the far counter.

"Oh, okay," Marinette said wiping her hands once more on the apron. She walked toward the living room, Adrien following her.

The two sat awkwardly on the couch next to each other. Marinette leaned back and looked at him. He was unusually still.

"Relax," she offered as she grabbed the television remote and flipped it on. She walked to the tv and began to press various buttons and pulling controllers out. "How about a little video game to ease your mind?"

Adrien laughed softly as he rubbed the back of his neck, "You know how to make me feel better, my Lady." He grabbed the remote she offered him and began to select his character.

"That reminds me of something I wanted to talk to you about," she said softly as their match began.

"What's that?" Adrien was half focused on the game, it seemed that Marinette was as well.

"I want to tell my parents about *her*," she responded as she shot him a glance.

"You mean..."

"Yeah."

"Oh," Adrien looked up at the screen, he was barely trying.

"I don't want to tell them if you are not okay with it," she said at last. "We are a team and everything we do needs to be as one."

"Like a married couple, huh?" Adrien laughed to himself, but his blush was hard to hide.

"Basically," Marinette agreed, "After what happened yesterday I don't want my parents to wonder where I am all the time."

"They'll probably worry."

"I know. But it would be better for them if they knew that I was not some weak little girl. They need to know that I can take care of myself at least a little bit."

"I think you're right."

"I know to ask this of you is selfish," Marinette started. She had put her controller down a while ago, "but can you tell my parents about *him* too?"

Adrien placed the controller in his lap and looked at her. Tom had come up from the bakery and was talking loudly to Sabine about how good it smelled.

"It would be hard to explain to my parents that I am not cheating on you with Chat, for one thing," she offered with a small smile, "And

you would not have to awkwardly come in the front door after coming in through the terrace. And we can feed you!"

"You are treating me like a stray cat," Adrien said with fake offense.

"Because you *are* a stray cat," Marinette elbowed him and picked up her controller again. "What do you think?"

"If that's what you want," Adrien said as he started playing again.

"NO!" Marinette sent Adrien flying across the screen, "Not what I want!"

"What?!" Adrien was shocked at this sudden outburst.

"It's what is right!" she said as she threw his mecha again. "I don't want you agreeing just because it's what I want. I want you to agree because it is the right thing to do!"

"Alright!" Adrien landed a punch on Marinette's mecha, "I really do think it is the right thing. What you said made sense."

Marinette's mecha was body slammed, "That's how we work," she kicked him across the platform, "mutual respect and teamwork."

"And a mean right hook," Adrien added as he tried desperately to throw her off the platform. "Hold still!"

"Nevaaarrrr!"

"Mari!"

"Adrien!"

"Dinner!"

"Victory!" Adrien jumped up from the couch with both fists in the air.

"It was a fluke," Marinette said as she placed the controller on the armrest of the couch and turned off the television.

"No fluke," Adrien said as he shined his nails on his sleeve, "I'm just *Paw* some."

"I need to get my controller *insect* ed for *bugs*," Marinette added as they sat down at the table.

Tom and Sabine were beaming.

Dinner was simple. The food was delicious. Adrien was overjoyed. Conversation was simple and easy.

"So," Tom said placing his fork and knife on the table and looking sternly at Adrien. "What are your intentions with my daughter?"

The sound of forks hitting the table and Marinette choking followed.

"My intentions?" Adrien asked looking from a red Marinette to Tom and back again, "I just want to make sure that she is safe and happy."

"Not to be rude," Tom said leaning forward slightly, "but this doesn't have anything to do with what happened yesterday, does it?"

"Well, yes," Adrien started, "It has almost everything to do with yesterday. Of course, there are other factors involved with this as well. But my main desire is that Marinette has a safe and happy life with no fear of someone trying to hurt her physically, emotionally, or otherwise."

"You mentioned other factors," Tom urged, "What would those be?"

"Actually," Adrien said looking at Marinette, who caught his gaze and smiled shyly. "Marinette and I both want to tell you something."

"You two are finally dating!" Sabine shouted as she clapped her hands. "Oh I knew it! It was only a matter of time!"

"No!" Marinette cut in, "I mean, yes, but that's not it."

"You weren't going to tell us about this, Mari?" Tom asked cocking his head to the side.

"Of course I was," Marinette defended, "I thought it was obvious when he came for dinner," she mumbled, "Adrien and I are dating, happy?"

"Overjoyed!" Sabine cheered as she slapped Tom on the forearm, "And here we are interrupting their first date! Oh, Tom! We should let these two be!"

"Not yet, Sabine," Tom scolded, "I need to give this young man my permission!"

"I'd be honored, sir," Adrien had the biggest grin on his face.

"But we still have something important to tell them!" Marinette said as she hit Adrien on his forearm.

"Well, tell us then," Sabine urged.

"Maman, Papa," Marinette started and choked again, "I am, I mean, Adrien and I are..." she stopped to try to gain the confidence and then a thought occurred to her, "Oh gosh, it sounds like I'm telling you I'm pregnant."

Adrien sputtered and Sabine gasped. Tom was oddly still.

"I'M NOT I'M NOT I AM NOT!" Marinette shouted over the table waving her hands frantically. "We're Ladybug!"

The parents raised their eyebrows.

"I mean," she let out a breath, "I'm Ladybug. Adrien is Chat Noir."

"It's true," Adrien offered, holding up his ring.

Sabine and Tom looked at one another for a moment. Sabine was the first to smile, making the tense Marinette and Adrien relax a little. She got up from her chair and walked over to Marinette, enveloping her in a hug.

"Oh, sweetheart," she cooed, "I'm sorry to say we've known the entire time."

"Not about Chat Noir," Tom cut in with a smile to Adrien, who offered a weak laugh in return.

"Right, well," Sabine said as she walked over to Adrien and draped her arms over him as well, "any partner of our daughter is a welcome member of this family in my book."

"Welcome to the family, son," Tom said with a thumbs up.

Adrien's eyes started to sting as he felt Marinette grab his hand. The last five minutes were truly an emotional roller coaster.

"How did you know?" Marinette was in shock.

"You insult me, child," Sabine said as she placed a hand to her chest. "I can pinpoint your voice in a crowd of almost a hundred people. I'm pretty sure a little red mask is not enough to hide you from the gaze of your mother."

Marinette rested her chin on the back of her hand and squinted her eyes at her mother, "Well played, Madame. Well played."

Sabine winked at her daughter with a wide grin on her face.

"Now," Tom said clapping his hands, "back to giving my permission."

"Marinette, come help me in the kitchen," Sabine said as she stood from the table. "This is a conversation for men only."

"Then who will be a part of the conversation? There is no one here who can be actually labeled as a *man*," Marinette said as she stood

up, giving her father a dirty look.

" Meow ch, my Lady," Adrien said looking up at her, "you wound me."

Marinette winked and walked into the kitchen, leaving the two not-considered-men-by-their-women alone at the table.

"You said something about other factors, I believe," Tom said leaning back on his chair. "Of course, knowing that you are the leather-clad cat-boy that fights tirelessly to keep my daughter safe has earned you some good points.

"Ah, right," Adrien said with a smile, "but there is also the fact that she is a wonderful person in general that plays an important role in this."

"Are you attracted to her?" Tom said bluntly.

"Ah," Adrien felt his entire body grow hot from the question. "I mean, well, er, she's, um..."

"How would you describe her to your father?" Tom said with a laugh.

Adrien took a deep breath. How would Adrien describe Marinette to a man who does not particularly care? No, how would he describe her to someone who *did* care?

"Marinette is an incredibly kind, loyal, strong, stubborn, capable woman. She stands for what is true, hates lies, and is willing to make things right when she is in the wrong. She wants what is best for those around her. She is not particularly interested in what makes her happy, but finds the happiness of others as enough to make her happy. She is funny, the only person to make me laugh. I mean, she *really* makes me laugh, you know?"

"I know," Tom said with a twinkle in his eye.

"She's really clumsy, but works really hard. She is creative and unique. And her smile makes even the darkest day seem clear."



"Well then," Tom said standing. He grabbed the plates around him. Adrien stood awkwardly and began to help.

The two walked into the kitchen and handed the dishes to the girls who were cleaning and clearing the way for dessert.

"Well?" Sabine said as she stuck her chin out in anticipation.

"I see no problem in the two of them being together."

Marinette squealed and leapt up into Tom's arms, giving him a kiss on the cheek. "Thank you, Papa!"

"How about dessert and a movie, then?" Tom said as he put his daughter back down.

Marinette hugged Adrien carefully with her free arm and kissed his cheek as well.

"Sounds great!" Adrien said as the blood rushed back to his cheeks.

The rest of the night was filled with laughter and love.

The rest of their lives ahead of them, Adrien and Marinette agreed to go through it side by side, no matter the evil they faced.

They never freed Paris from the evils of Human Trafficking. But Adrien became a lead voice in the awareness and prevention. The world might not have become perfectly safe, but it definitely was a little less scary.